

## psychology- consciousness studies

### Myers for the 21st Century

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### IRREDUCIBLE MIND: Towards a Psychology for the 21st Century

Edward Kelly, Emily Williams  
Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan  
Gauld, Michael Grosso &  
Bruce Greyson

Lanhan, Maryland: Roman &  
Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007, 800  
pp., \$63.96 h/b - ISBN 0742547922.  
With CD containing F. W. H. Myers'  
hard-to-find classic two-volume *Human  
Personality* (1903) and selected  
contemporary reviews

*Irreducible Mind* (IM) is one of the most well researched, copiously annotated and carefully argued attacks on physicalism and epiphenomenalism to date. It is a sophisticated attempt to incorporate parapsychology (or other data often ignored by mainstream science) within a scientific theory of mind, and a must-read for anyone working in consciousness studies, psychology and the history of science.

Although a massive collaborative effort by six distinguished authors who work in psychiatry, psychology and philosophy, one could easily mistake it for the work of a single author given its coherence of style and thought, which is rare with edited volumes. The authors share a common dissatisfaction with physicalism, the

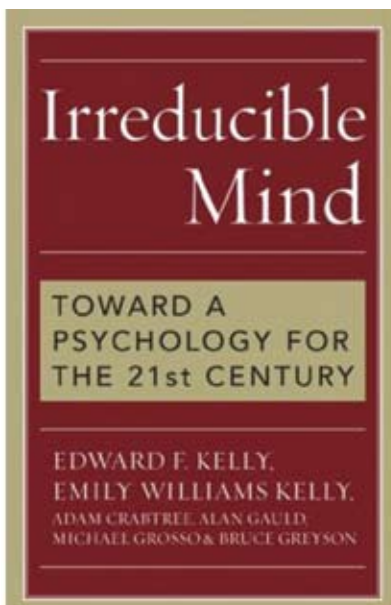
received academic conception of mind, arguing that a viable alternative does exist and basing their views on those of F. W. H. Myers. They cite research from many areas of psychology. There's a diversity of empirical evidence suggesting that consciousness profoundly influences the physical world, that it may survive death and that aspects of many physical phenomena are manifestations of an underlying mental reality. They argue that 'physicalist theories of mind-brain relations are inadequate in principle' (p. 639) so we need a conception of mind-body able to accommodate all that we know about them.

Chapter 1 (Edward Kelly) is an overview of the past few centuries of philosophy of mind, paranormal research and psychology. Kelly brings philosophical subtlety and wide-ranging historical knowledge, making the chapter an important resource for advanced undergraduate and graduate teaching in psychology, philosophy and history of science. But Kelly is not merely reporting history—he engages it, thereby making an interesting story all the more provocative, arguing that reductionism has failed to provide an adequate explanation of consciousness and that non-reductionistic alternatives have been overlooked. A problem with this chapter, however, is that sometimes Kelly argues that computational theories of mind have not told us anything meaningful about consciousness (p. 45), yet he also says that a robust theory of consciousness must take into consideration everything we can learn about it. Surely he cannot be arguing that neuroscience has contributed nothing to our understanding of the 'hard problem' because it has operated (primarily) within a materialist paradigm?

Chapter 2 (Emily Kelly) provides an important overview of Myers' thought, which is unfortunately overshadowed by that of William James—a friend and admirer of his—despite Myers's importance in the history of Western thought. It describes the problems associated with a major assumption of contemporary psychology; that the psyche can adequately be approached via the methods of physics. It sets out the philosophical foundations, detailed by Myers' himself, on which the scientific evidence in the rest of the book is built (discussed briefly below).

Chapters 3 – 8 each refer to hundreds of studies aimed at showing that mental states do influence the world in a variety of ways and that minds do survive death (and live to tell about it). Apparently supranormal experiences are also described, raising questions about the capabilities of mind. The anecdotes and other evidence is critically discussed, thus avoiding both 'New Age' naivety and the knee-jerk rejection common in academia. Chapter 3 (Emily Kelly) tells, for example, of psychosomatic conditions in which a mother believes she is pregnant (but is not) and develops the symptoms of pregnancy. There is a study of a Yogin who was able to stop his heart from beating at will for almost five days before returning to a normal condition (p. 177). These indicate profound levels of mental causation. Chapter 4 (Alan Gauld) argues that memory and personal identity need not be rooted in the brain because of, for instance, near-death experiences and Ian Stevenson's studies on reincarnation. Gauld also discusses problems with contemporary psychological and neurological conceptions of memory. Chapter 5 (Adam Crabtree) examines reports in which a person automatically sends a message containing objective information unobtainable through normal means via a supposed personality from another realm (p. 307). Myers seemed to think this second personality was not necessarily an independent personality (p. 354), but an otherwise hidden aspect of the mind.

We hear of Leonora Piper of Boston who for 40 years was able to channel personalities, thus providing supranormal knowledge and embody mannerisms of people unknown to her; Crabtree suggests these reports (and others) were never falsified. Chapter 6 (Emily Kelly, Bruce Greyson and Ed Kelly) examines near-death and out-of-body experiences as well as sensations gained from the dead. Physicalism clearly cannot accommodate these accounts, yet it is argued they deserve our attention. They provide a lucid critique of physicalist explanations. Chapter 7 (Ed Kelly and Michael Grosso) treat genius, or 'the spontaneous production of original, unexpected and unteachable work that wins our admiration' (p. 427). Here they are not taking on physicalism or epiphenomenalism themselves, rather the 'nothing-special' interpretation of genius,



which considers it the result of mere special effort. Chapter 8 (Ed Kelly and Grosso) treats mystical experience, the 'near-relative' of genius. This is not a theological or comparative project, but a serious appraisal of 'the psychological character and biological accompaniments of these powerful experience,' which also tries to find a middle ground between the naïve acceptance of some religious believers and the unthinking reductionism of some academics (p. 496). The canonical mystical experiences are discussed along with the various sorts of interpretations of them. They recognize the biological role and impact of mystical experiences, yet critique reductionistic accounts. They recognize the need of traveling to the Orient to further study mystics (p. 572).

Chapter 9 (Edward Kelly) is the grandest in scope; it attempt to reconcile the wide range of data on mystical experiences, genius, apparitions, mediums, etc. in previous chapters with the Myers/James 'filter' theory of consciousness, as well as with the latest findings in many branches of physics and psychology. The Myers/James filter theory says that the human being is made of two aspects; a psyche that interacts with the body/brain. The brain does not produce consciousness/mind, but it is an organ that influences, shapes, constrains, enhances and otherwise 'colours' consciousness in various sorts of ways (p. xxx, p. 73, pp. 603-43). This view, argues Kelly, explains 'rogue' information and can accommodate quantum mechanics. Although dualistic, the authors of IM reject Cartesian dualism because the concept of matter is so problematic: 'Matter as we customarily experience it does not exist, at least not in the way we naïvely believe it to exist' (p. 631). So while there is some sense in which consciousness and body are different, the difference must not be understood in conventional philosophical terms or in terms of ordinary experience. Just as this filter view is reconcilable with quantum mechanics, Kelly argues it is not at odds with the brain-sciences because the self exists in an intimate relationship with the body; just as a parasite is influence by the host, so is the self influenced by the body (p. 624). This is a poor analogy because a parasite often dies when separated from the host, but Kelly wants to say consciousness can exist

without the body. Whatever the case, the filter theory allows for changes in the brain's chemistry to impact the psyche. Only adding to the author's aspiration for a truly interdisciplinary and integrative approach to the study of consciousness is their willingness to involve 'religion' and 'science' what we think will ultimately prove most helpful in catalyzing further theoretical progress will be thoroughgoing application—determined and disciplined, but also sympathetic and flexible—of Western-style scientific imagination to the to the phenomenological realities revealed by the great contemplative traditions, both East and West. We need to chart more fully and accurately the natural history of these 'higher' or 'deeper' subliminal realms' (p. 638). For someone such as myself who studies Hindu views mind, body and consciousness, these are refreshing statements indeed.

Despite its clarity, IM does tend to lapse into unnecessary polemic; too much ink was spilt bemoaning dogmatic materialists who simply will not take an unbiased view of paranormal science. Although one can sympathize, I found myself skipping long passages that kept repeating the same message in different words. Perhaps the space could have been devoted to garnering support from those who are neither fanatically materialistic nor fully involved in the study of non-conventional subjects like reincarnation, mysticism, etc.

Some questions not answered in IM: What causes the intimate relationship between the consciousness and body? What makes the linkage strong, or in some cases, weak? Why, if what they say is true, do I exist within this body rather than some other body? Nor is it clear (and the authors do recognize this problem), 'which aspects of 'cognitive unconscious' go with the brain, which with the associated [disembodied] psyche, and how their respective contributions get coordinated' (p. 629). The solid philosophical and empirical foundations laid in IM provide an excellent basis on which to further approach an answer to these questions.

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## Advancing Well-Being

*David Lorimer*

### HAPPINESS

**Richard Layard**

Allen Lane, 2005, Penguin, 2006,  
310 pp., £8.99 p/b  
ISBN 978 0 14 101690 0

### A GOOD CHILDHOOD

**Richard Layard and Judy Dunn**

Penguin, 2009, 239 pp., £9.99 p/b  
ISBN 978 0 141 03943 5

Back in the 1970s, when I first learned economics at University, lecturers used to speak of consumers maximising their satisfaction, other things, of course, being equal - which they never are. Richard Layard is an economist from the LSE, who founded their Centre for Economic Performance, and now directs its programme on well-being. A friend told him that publication of his book on happiness, subtitled 'lessons from a new science', would change his life, and it certainly has. The central question that he investigates in this book is why we are no happier than we were 50 years ago, even though most of us are better off in many respects. In other words, what is the relationship between economic growth and happiness or well-being? He approaches this issue using not only economics, but also philosophy, psychology and neuroscience in an evidence-based search for answers. His philosophical roots are in the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, who is quoted at the end of the book in a remarkably clear injunction: 'create all the happiness you are able to create: remove all the misery of you are able to remove'. The structure of the book is an analysis of the problem, followed by a discussion of what can be done.

Common to both books is a critique of individualism which also argues that we need the concept of a common good, towards which we can all contribute. Excessive individualism believes that it is the prime duty of individuals to make the most of their own lives rather than contribute to the good of others. However, self-realisation is not enough, and psychological research finds that unselfish people are on average happier than those more preoccupied with themselves. Behind this lies the economics of Adam Smith's invisible hand, whereby the good of all is supposedly promoted by each individual pursuing their own interests. This leads to an emphasis